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RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000352

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [CASC](#) [QA](#)  
SUBJECT: QATAR - DEPORTATIONS DROPPED FOR 31 US CITIZENS

REF: A. DOHA 333  
[1](#)B. DOHA 345

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

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(C) KEY POINTS  
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-- Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdullah Khalid Al Thani informed Ambassador May 28 that the deportation orders for all 31 Americans have been rescinded.

-- Shaykh Abdullah was emphatic: the Americans had broken the law. He asked that Embassy help explain Qatar's proselytization and religious freedom laws to the American community.

-- Al Thani emphasized that Qatar watches all religious activities closely, including Muslim activities. For example, all Muslim Friday sermons are pre-approved by the government and limited to about 15 minutes. Mosques are required to close 10 minutes after the conclusion of Friday prayers.

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(C) COMMENTS  
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-- This is a good outcome, perhaps the best possible. It also reflects the helpful intervention of the Prime Minister, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff, and senior officials at the MFA, all of whom Ambassador contacted about the issue early on. At least one, the Chief of Staff, talked to the Amir about the deportation orders.

-- The quick action by these senior officials indicates the strong desire by Qatar's leadership for better bilateral relations, especially better political relations.

-- Embassy officials will meet, at Shaykh Abdullah's recommendation, with MFA officials next week to discuss communicating Qatar's religious laws more clearly and more widely to the American community.

End Key Points and Comments.

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador LeBaron and Consular Section Chief Timothy Ponce called May 28th on Minister of State for Interior Affairs Abdullah Khalid Al Thani at his office at the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador told Al Thani that all of the Americans involved informed U.S. Embassy staff that their deportation orders had been rescinded. Was that true?

[1](#)3. (C) Yes, Al Thani replied. Everything had been stopped due to the Ambassador's interest in their cases, even though the Americans had broken Qatar's laws. Qatar wanted excellent relations with the United States.

¶4. (C) Ambassador thanked Al Thani for the government's leniency and noted that the U.S. Embassy wanted to help explain Qatar's laws to the American citizen community to ensure this didn't occur again.

¶5. (C) Ambassador asked Al Thani if his Ministry could provide a contact for the Christian groups in Qatar, or if the U.S. Embassy should direct them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which currently handles liaison with other religious groups in Qatar.

¶6. (C) Without addressing the point of contact issue directly, Al Thani replied that the Government of Qatar (GOQ) supports religious dialogue and openness to other religions, not just Christianity. He asked that the U.S. Embassy help the GOQ by explaining Qatar's laws to these and other Americans to be sure this does not occur again.

¶7. (C) Al Thani continued that the GOQ welcomes the other nationalities who come to work and live in Qatar and respects their religions. The GOQ respects others beliefs and wants to work with them. Christians are free to do whatever they wish inside their churches, and the MOI will help ensure their security and assist the MFA with reviewing requests to sponsor visitors from other countries who desire to speak at churches.

¶8. (C) The GOQ wishes everyone to leave their religion inside their places of worship, Al Thani made clear. Religious activities in Doha's Industrial Area and in public are illegal and could risk not only the individual's safety but

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public security.

¶9. (C) However, Al Thani pointed out that Christians were not being held to a separate standard. The GOQ watches all religious activities, including those by the Muslim community. As an example, all Friday sermons are pre-approved and must conclude by a set time. After the Friday sermon, no one is allowed to stay in the mosque more than 10 minutes; those who do and the mosques where the sermons go long are watched closely. He said that the mosque is a place to pray, not a place to talk about politics, stir dissent against other religions or countries, or to discuss wars in the region.

¶10. (C) Ambassador thanked Al Thani for his quick response and asked how the U.S. Embassy could assist the GOQ's efforts to ensure residents in Qatar understood Qatar's law. Al Thani asked the Ambassador to meet with Saoud Al Mahmoud, Director of the MOI's International Cooperation Department, to discuss the law and explain it to the American Community.

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FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS  
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¶11. (SBU) Ambassador, Con Chief and Poloff expect to meet with Al Mahmoud and his staff next week to discuss Qatar's religious freedom laws.

¶12. (SBU) Con Chief will call the Americans involved to inform them of the MOI's formal rescission of the deportation orders.

¶13. (SBU) Following our meeting with Al Mahmoud, Con Chief will organize a meeting with the Americans involved and other interested Americans to explain Qatar's religious freedom laws and what they mean for Americans living in Qatar. We will also update our current consular guidance and religious freedom reporting as necessary based on the results of this meeting.

LeBaron